

### **Module 1: Environment~ Indicator 4:**

**Goal:** I will learn about how to foster appropriate standards of behavior through communication and consistent reinforcement, and as a result, students will demonstrate expected behaviors according to the established rules and conducive to a productive learning environment for all students.

**Initial Summary:** In the beginning of the year my students and I discussed and created a set of classroom rules and expectations that they must follow in a variety of settings. Students are reminded of these expectations throughout the day to help lessons run smoothly and effectively. Five students are still in need of constant reminders regarding appropriate behavior and following teacher directives. I have observed that these five students have great difficulty staying focused and following directions during our Literacy block which entails whole group, small group, and independent practice. This causes my lessons to be frequently interrupted and less productive because I have to pause and redirect between 6 and 8 times, losing at least 15 minutes of instruction. I implement the school-wide positive behavior support system that rewards students with stars when they display appropriate behavior. I also use "Bucket Fillers" in my classroom to teach children the importance of being kind to one another and how we can all make a difference in someone else's day. There are still five students who do not respond to these incentives. Consistent reinforcement of rules and expectations are essential for creating a productive learning environment, and this is something I need to establish in my classroom to accomplish my goal.

### **Reflection Paper:**

To determine the indicator I wanted to focus on in Module 1, I began to reflect on my teaching and the areas that need strengthening and guidance to better my classroom environment. I thought about my students' behavior in the classroom and how it has affected my instruction. To identify my professional growth focus, I used the CCT Performance Profile to explore my current practice and review the profile continuum for each indicator. Indicator four promotes a positive learning environment through students' positive behaviors, aligning with the rules in the classroom. I knew that I wanted to improve the students' behavior so that my classroom instruction could run smoothly and effectively. I wanted my students to have a clear understanding of the expectations in my classroom so their behavior will support a productive learning environment.

I began my new learning by talking with another teacher about effective classroom management strategies and techniques. The first thing the teacher asked me was "What are your classroom rules and where are they posted?" She then asked "Do your students have a clear understanding of what you expect them to do?" Those simple questions made me realize that the first thing I needed to do was revisit the classroom rules with my students by identifying specific rules and procedures. The most critical part about this step is that the students were engaged in the design of the rules and procedures so they have a clear understanding of my expectations.

With the idea of redesigning my classroom rules and procedures, I immediately used Robert Marzano's "**Classroom Management That Works**" as a resource and tool to support this new learning. Marzano suggested that the rules address categories involving politeness and helpfulness, respecting teachers and students around you, transitions and interruptions, as well as seatwork and teacher-led activities. Another resource I used was a video shown on the **American Psychological Association** (APA) website. This video suggested that there are no more than three to seven general rules. These rules should be positively stated and explained by discussing what they should look like, sound like, and feel like. After learning about different ways to introduce and implement the rules in a classroom, I quickly jumped to the opportunity of starting fresh and applying this new learning.

I began a classroom meeting with my students by having a discussion that regarding the fact that many situations in life entail rules and procedures. I asked my students, "Can you think of a rule you have to follow outside of school?" My students quickly raised their hands and shared many moments where they had to follow rules. For example, fastening their seatbelts, walking on a cross walk, making their bed at home, and putting dishes in the dishwasher after using them. By discussing the expectations that the students have outside of school, the students were able to make the connections between the rules and procedures they must follow inside and outside of school.

We titled our new and improved set of classroom rules "Our Classroom Agreements." The students were engaged in the process of creating the classroom rules because we were able to reflect on what was happening in our classroom currently and agree on what should change to enhance our classroom environment and make it more conducive to learning. When setting a rule in place, the students shared with one another how it feels when this happens in their classroom, what it looks like, and what it sounds like. An example of this is when one student raised their hand and presented "use our manners" as a rule for the classroom. The students shared that it would sound like this, "Please", "Thank you," and "Excuse me." One student then modeled what using your manners should look like by folding his hands, looking at the speaker, and smiling. Another student added that using your manners "makes you feel good on the inside." The class created a list of seven rules as a team. The classroom agreements were written on a poster and hung in front of the room.

After creating and posting these rules, I decided to make these rules a part of our morning meeting every day. I saw an impact on the student's behaviors when I began to review these rules with the students every morning. The rules are clearly and positively stated so the students are told what they should be doing rather than a "do not" statement. I am happy to report that I am seeing a vast improvement in the attitudes and behaviors of my students in just a short 4 week period. Students are interrupting less during my lessons because these rules are reviewed first thing in the morning. After getting to know my students more and more, I have become better aware of which specific students need the extra reminders. I use this knowledge by taking a moment when the students greet me in the morning to remind them of a specific behavior we are trying to improve. In addition to the morning meeting, I have taken 5 minutes prior to dismissal to allow students to reflect on the day. This gives students time to celebrate a moment and a time to set a goal for the class regarding something we need to work on.

Consistent reinforcement in a classroom allows students to internalize the teacher's expectations so they can be independent. The APA website provided many research based techniques for classroom management. By shifting the focus on noticing or rewarding the students who are doing the task they are assigned, students will realize that the only way to

get the teachers attention is through positive behavior. To learn more about this strategy, my mentor and I set up an afternoon where I was able to observe experienced teachers with strong classroom management skills. After spending an afternoon with these teachers, I felt inspired, determined, and eager to start applying all of the strategies I observed. The first technique I applied immediately in my classroom was learning how to consistently recognize students who demonstrate appropriate standards of behavior. During the observations, the students' behaviors were consistently reinforced with verbal and non-verbal praise.

After observing these teachers, I committed myself to creating a learning environment that consistently recognizes positive behaviors. As I began to implement the techniques I observed, I quickly realized that this is something I already did in my classroom, but the inconsistency is what made less of an impact. Non-verbal cues that I observed and implemented were simple signs such as a thumb up, big smile, or high five. Multiple times within a five minute period, I recognize the positive behaviors through a verbal praise. For example, "I like the way I see A sitting in her seat waiting for the next direction" or "I love what I see J doing, thank you." These verbal praises give attention to a student who is modeling the correct behavior. This impacts the other students immediately because they are reminded of exactly what they should be doing and want to be recognized as well. During a transition, I saw J put his materials away and come to the rug quietly. After seeing J's transition, I gave him a verbal praise by saying "I love the way J put all his materials away and came to the rug quietly." Five other students then transitioned to the rug right behind him. Another example of this technique used is during a whole group lesson. When a student was raising their hand quietly to share something, I said out loud "Thank you M for raising your hand when you want to share your answer." The other students then stopped calling out and moving in their seats because they knew what the teacher expectations were. These techniques also impacted my teaching and the students learning because less time is being taken away from my instruction, therefore the students are able to spend more time on the guided and independent practice.

The next technique I put into practice improved the transitions in the classroom. As I observed a teacher during a transition period, I noticed two strategies he used to manage and promote positive classroom behavior. First, he reminded students of behavioral expectations prior to the transition. Then, he asked a group of students to model how to return to their seats from the carpet, take out the materials they needed, and wait for the next direction. Students were then told and determined to do it just like them. After trying this in my classroom, it is clear to see the benefits of reviewing and modeling the behavioral expectations. Our transition time went from about four minutes to two minutes! Students are now able to get their work started sooner and less negative behaviors are being seen during this transition period.

When watching the video on classroom management, one statement really made me think about the physical arrangement in my classroom. The narrator said "Maximize the likelihood of a positive and effective learning climate." I then looked at the set up in my classroom. I asked myself "How does the seating arrangement promote interaction with each other?" When meeting with an experienced teacher, I asked her advice on ways to set up my classroom. She suggested setting up "pods" in the room. These are small collaborative groups set up in the classroom. Each group gets a star in the middle of their group. The goal is to fill it with stickers that are earned by positive behaviors seen by the entire group. I thought this was a great way to promote interpersonal and small group skills such as communication, trust, leadership, decision making, and conflict resolution. I decided to give it a trial run.

After just one day I saw the immediate benefits of cooperative learning. The first thing I noticed with these groups was the dramatic increase in team work. Students were saying "Hey, quick, put all your stuff away! We are almost the first group ready!" or "I will help you get your stuff together!" When reinforcing a group's success, the other groups quickly completed the task. When I verbally reinforced a group for waiting quietly to line up at the door, within 10 seconds, the other three groups were also ready to line up. By consistently recognizing the positive behaviors, students are self correcting their behaviors and allowing more time for instruction.

When applying these strategies in my classroom I was still concerned with a small group of children that were not benefitting from the positive recognition. Although students around them were be great role models and being reinforced for their positive behaviors, these students were still having difficulty demonstrating appropriate behaviors. When discussing this problem with my mentor, she suggested Robert Marzano's book "**Classroom Instruction That Works**." Through the readings, one particular strategy that I felt would benefit this particular group of students is called "Pause, Prompt, and Praise." This strategy is best used when a student is having difficulty with a task and needs redirection. The teacher will simply ask the student to stop working for a moment (pause), and then ask them why they are having difficulty. The teacher will then prompt the student by suggesting a specific suggestion on how to improve. If the student then improves his/her performance then praise is given.

I began this strategy with the students who I observed were having difficulty 10-15 times a day. The students responded very well to this strategy. By reacting calmly to the students, and focusing their attention to the expectations, rules, and suggestions on what to do, I am able to manage their behavior and continue my instruction. When doing a whole group activity, A was discarding the directions and ripping up papers in his desk. I reacted to this behavior by praising another student who was following the directions. This did not change A's behavior. I then told A to stop ripping the paper and to look at me in the eyes. Once I made eye contact with the A, I asked him "What are you having difficulty with?" A replied "I do not have a pencil." After suggesting a way to solve the problem, A asked another friend for a pencil and began following directions for the activity. I then praised A for making the right decision and solving his problem.

For the moments during my instruction when I saw the students needed a nonverbal cue to stay on task, I found that changing the tone in my voice, making eye contact, and changing my proximity were quick ways to keep the students on task. These students tend to get distracted easily so this is a great way to grab their attention. When A was talking to another student during my instruction, I walked close to her desk and made eye contact with her. A would then stop talking immediately and listen to my directions. Teacher awareness and nonverbal cues are an effective technique to keep the students on task and aware of your expectations.

Through observations, research, and practice, I have learned that inconsistency gives students conflicting messages about the appropriate behavior they should be showing. As I have improved the consistency in recognizing positive behaviors, I have noticed less need for applying consequences. Although, if a consequence must be enforced, you must follow through so the consequence is received but then let go of any grudge. If a student is not showing appropriate behaviors I will first give reminders about the appropriate behaviors immediately after the behavior is seen. If stating what the students should be doing does not change the behavior, the student will be given a warning. I have a red, yellow green light in my room that tells the student if they are being warned. In most cases, I have found

that this dismisses the behavior. If that is not the case, the student will receive the appropriate consequence, determined by the severity of the behavior. By having a behavior plan that is set, consistent, and clear to the students, the learning environment has improved for all students.

In addition, I learned the importance of explicit instruction. To create an optimum learning environment, students must be engaged in what they are learning. They must understand the academic material put in front of them or they will put their energy into bad behavior. As their teacher, I must continue to use enthusiasm and humor when teaching because this keeps them engaged and increases the level of student response and motivation. Overall, if the student's interaction with the curriculum and the instruction is well thought out, this will prevent break downs in the students learning. As a first year teacher, this is something that I am working on every single day. The more experience I get, the more I will improve. I am determined to continue applying all of the strategies I have learned through variety of resources. I will continue to plan thoughtful and meaningful lessons to increase the students' engagement and excitement in their learning. I have several skills that still need strengthening such as making my behavior expectations clear prior to teaching a lesson. Also, I will redirect students' behaviors when necessary and consistently enforce the appropriate consequences. My new learning has shown me many new ways to create a productive learning environment. Students in my classroom will demonstrate behaviors that are consistent with the established expectations as I continue to foster appropriate standards of behavior.